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LETTER DATED 18 JANUARY 2000 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SENEGAL TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a letter regarding the AIDS pandemic from Mr. Abdou Diouf, President of the Republic of Senegal, addressed to you following the debate which the Security Council held on 10 January 2000 on the impact of AIDS on peace and security in Africa (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Ibra Deguène KA
Ambassador

00-25407 (E) 240100 240100

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Annex

Letter from the President of the Republic of Senegal addressed to the Secretary-General

AIDS PANDEMIC

The hope generated by the goal of "Health for all by the year 2000" set by the international community in Almaty is, today, being called into question, not because States and communities have not made significant efforts but rather because the AIDS pandemic is casting a shadow on the horizon now at the end of the twentieth century.

There is no longer any doubt that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is far from being just a public health problem. It is - particularly for our continent, where AIDS is taking the heaviest toll - a development problem or even, quite simply, a problem of the future. It is therefore fortunate that the United Nations has grasped the magnitude of the threat that this disease poses for human development and has decided to coordinate the efforts of the agencies of the United Nations system through the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

You are all aware that as early as 1992, on our initiative, my peers and I adopted a resolution at the Organization of African Unity summit, in Dakar, recognizing HIV/AIDS as a veritable threat to the future of the continent and committing our States to making every effort to halt the spread and impact of the epidemic.

We have no choice but to recognize that the resolution did not produce the desired reaction. That is why, faced with the alarming situation, my country, Senegal, although its epidemiological situation was relatively favourable, undertook to respond, resolutely and at an early stage, in a wide-ranging, multisectoral and multidisciplinary fashion.

As soon as the first cases of AIDS made their appearance, a national programme to combat AIDS was set up. It is true that the programme benefited from the fact that prior to the epidemic the structural situation was favourable. Not only had a blood transfusion policy been adopted and implemented as far back as 1970, with the development of numerous blood bank structures, but measures to deal with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) had been integrated into family-planning activities. In addition, Senegalese society has been brought up on traditional and religious moral values.

As regards health, the fight against STDs was integrated into HIV/AIDS prevention strategies immediately following the establishment of the National Committee to Combat AIDS. The safety of the blood supply was quickly assured when commercial tests to detect the presence of the HIV virus came onto the market (you may recall that it was in Senegal that researchers first drew attention to the existence of HIV-2. Starting in 1990, condoms were made widely available; the distribution and sale of condoms in Senegal has increased tenfold over the last 10 years.

As regards information, education and communication (IEC), Senegal, as ly as 1992, made sexual education for young people and information about the nsmission of HIV part of the primary and secondary school curriculum; in 7, more than 130,000 school textbooks on information, education and munication about HIV/AIDS were distributed in public and private educational titutions.

There are several hundred non-governmental organizations and associations olved in the fight against AIDS. There are associations of people living h HIV and they are participating energetically in the fight against AIDS. informal and professional sectors have been saturated with community efforts awareness-raising campaigns. This wide-ranging response to the epidemic can o be measured by the tens of thousands of information, education and munication materials (brochures, handbooks, videos, posters and so forth) ch have been produced by the National Committee to Combat AIDS and community anizations.

Political dialogue is another key strategy of the response to HIV/AIDS in egal. As far back as 1988, there have been seminars, training sessions and cussions involving or organized by community and religious leaders, members parliament and professionals (journalists). As a result of these intensive reness-raising efforts, political and religious authorities at the highest el have repeatedly made public commitments and statements in the media moting the fight against AIDS (official speeches, sermons in churches and gues, radio programmes, commercials and so forth). Each one, according to sensibilities, has been preaching about safe ways of preventing HIV/AIDS: the one hand, the "moral" way (sexual abstinence, faithfulness) and on the er the "mechanical" way (condoms).

Today, in addition to the challenge of maintaining the benefits of the st decade of preventive efforts, which is reflected in a low and stable valence rate (approximately 1 per cent of the general population), there is challenge of access to new anti-retrovirus therapies which is creating a new between the rich nations and the developing nations where the majority of ected people live. In this new struggle, Senegal has again endeavoured to be the forefront by being in at the start of the discussion about the roduction of these new molecules into the African continent. This discussion resulted in the UNAIDS initiative from which two African countries have efited. In a desire to be consistent and constant, the State of Senegal has e a substantial further financial effort to enable people living with /AIDS in Senegal to have access to treatment.

Because of the encouraging results obtained by my country in this crusade inst HIV/AIDS, UNAIDS has honoured me, together with my colleague, sident Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, by awarding us first prize for excellence the struggle against AIDS. Far from making us complacent, we realize that s prize is an invitation to us to continue and increase the efforts, for now, e than ever, we must remain vigilant. The history of diseases teaches us t once we lower our guard, the infectious agents take advantage of this.

For me, it is also an opportunity to pay tribute to all our international, tilateral and bilateral partners who have sustained us in this struggle and

without whose help certain results could not have been achieved. We can count on the fame and influence of your institution to act as our interpreter vis à vis all these partners and to tell them that we are grateful and that we are firmly determined to do more and more to safeguard the achievements of development and to ensure to future generations a radiant horizon, free from the spectre of this pandemic and all the ills that accompany it.

Rest assured that you will always find in me a genuine standard-bearer of the fight against AIDS, both among my heads of State peers and within all regional, African and international forums.

(Signed) Abdou DIOUF